

Imagining Possible Futures

By: [Constance L. McKoy](#)

McKoy, C. L. (2017). Imagining possible futures. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 26(3), 3-6. doi: 10.1177/1057083717697668

C.L. McKoy, Imagining Possible Futures, Journal of Music Teacher Education (26,3) pp. 3-6. Copyright ©2017 National Association for Music Education. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications.

Made available courtesy of Sage Publications: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1057083717697668>

*****© National Association for Music Education. Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction is authorized without written permission from Journal of Music Teacher Education & Sage Publications. This version of the document is not the version of record. Figures and/or pictures may be missing from this format of the document. *****

Abstract:

A year ago, near this time, an unexpected and unfortunate series of events forced our professional organization to recognize the dangers of pretending that marginalized perspectives and issues of equity and access don't have a place in the discussion of our profession's status in the 21st century. By the time of the NAFME National Assembly in June of 2016, a primary focus of the meeting was concerned with addressing the question: Where should we, as an association and as a profession, go from here?

Keywords: Music Education | Diversity | Inclusion | Equity | Access | Change

Article:

A year ago, near this time, an unexpected and unfortunate series of events forced our professional organization to recognize the dangers of pretending that marginalized perspectives and issues of equity and access don't have a place in the discussion of our profession's status in the 21st century. By the time of the NAFME National Assembly in June of 2016, a primary focus of the meeting was concerned with addressing the question: Where should we, as an association and as a profession, go from here?

Although the central concern at that particular National Assembly was how NAFME should appropriately address issues of inclusion, equity, diversity, and access, these topics are just facets of a larger issue that our profession has been grappling with since the Tanglewood Symposium of 1967: how to keep school music instruction relevant in a time of rapid change. According to Mark (2000), three specific catalysts for change prompted the symposium: (1) school reform, (2) civil rights, and (3) technology. Mark noted that the concluding Declaration of the symposium

. . . made clear the imperative for the music education profession to address itself to the musical needs of every constituency in a nation that had only recently reached a fair degree of consensus

on civil rights, that was beginning to realize that it would be more and more affected by rapidly developing technology, and that had become painfully aware of the inadequacy of its schools. (p. 9)

Indeed, questions and suppositions surrounding future directions and possibilities in our profession have continued in the years following the Tanglewood Symposium and the conversations taking place within music teacher education have intensified over the past two decades. Issues of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access, as well as the changing nature of our society and the various ways in which music function within it, speak to a need for critical examinations of how we prepare music educators.

Jeff Kimpton is frequently credited for “lighting a fire” under SMTE at the 2004 MENC Biennial Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he challenged us, even dared us, to consider changing how we approach music teacher preparation. Kimpton’s purpose was to alert us to the dangers of maintaining the status quo.

Music education is at a crossroads, and the time we have to make the decision about which road to take is growing shorter with each year that we wait. The future viability of the musical academy and the vitality of music study in K–12 education is at stake in this country. Schools of music in this country initially grew because they were the primary source of music teachers for this country. I don’t believe that music in higher education will survive—at least in the number and quality that exist today—if the responsibility for preparing future teachers is abdicated by schools and departments of music in the future. (Kimpton, 2005, p. 10)

While Kimpton’s address has come to represent a significant point of demarcation in the evolution of the Society for Music Teacher Education (being the seed for the development of our Areas of Strategic Planning and Action), it was not the first time since Tanglewood that changes in music teacher preparation had been proposed. During the Housewright Symposium on Music Teacher Education in 1999, Carlesta Spearman spoke of the need for a 21st-century music teaching force prepared to teach music to an increasingly diverse P–12 student population.

Music teacher education programs in colleges and universities must provide a well-structured and culturally inclusive core-curriculum representative of (a) traditional areas of music study that have undergirded the competencies and standards required to complete high quality degree programs, and (b) ethnomusicological perspectives and competencies in order to prepare well-trained graduates for the teaching profession. (Spearman, 2000, p. 167)

Spearman (2000) clearly believed that the content of undergraduate study in music education needed to expand beyond the traditional Western European musical canon and embrace more global frames of reference. She also was one of a few leaders in the profession at the time who recognized a need to promote racial and ethnic diversity within the preservice music teacher population.

Just 2 years later, another formal gathering took place in an effort to investigate new models for music teacher preparation. In June of 2001, the first Institute on Music Teacher Education was held at Northwestern University. Sponsored by the College Music Society, the Society for Music

Teacher Education, and what was then MENC: The National Association for Music Education, the purpose of the institute was “to gather an interested assembly of collegiate music educators who would begin to articulate, research, and formulate solutions and strategies for the future of music teacher education” (Hickey & Rees, 2002, p. 9). The institute attendees engaged in a brainstorming session that resulted in the formulation of four major topics: “Creating Change in Higher Education,” “Partnerships,” “Curriculum,” and “Teacher Training.” Similar to the call articulated by Spearman (2000) and foreshadowing Kimpton’s (2005) address, the notion of a need for change in how music teachers are prepared in higher education was clearly present among the topics generated by the Institute participants.

Fast-forward 13 years to 2014, and we find a more recent document calling for a re-visioning of how music majors, including music education majors, are prepared. *Transforming Music Study from its Foundations: A Manifesto for Progressive Change in the Undergraduate Preparation of Music Majors* was written by the College Music Society Task Force on the Undergraduate Music Major (Sarath et al., 2014). In the document, the task force identifies what they view as deficiencies in the traditional course of study found in a majority of college and university music programs and provides suggestions for how these deficiencies might be addressed through a transformed model of music study that emphasizes musical creativity, musical diversity, and curricular integration. The manifesto makes clear that there is still much work to be done if music programs in higher education are to remain relevant and viable as we approach the end of the second decade of the 21st century.

July 23, 2017, will mark 50 years since the Tanglewood Symposium. Though some progress has been made toward achieving the goals outlined in the symposium’s Declaration, the fact that members of our profession have continued to call for change in music education and in music teacher preparation demonstrates that the issues precipitating the symposium persist. The capacity for institutions to respond to societal shifts varies depending on the institution in question. Educational institutions, particularly public ones, are notoriously slow in responding to change. This may be due, in part, to the fact that schools (and the colleges and universities that prepare the teachers for those schools), are subject to the shifting policy priorities of a given governing administration. As of this writing, Congress has just approved a new Secretary of Education. That the Vice President had to cast a tie-breaking vote is an indication of the division associated with the appointment. More than any appointment in recent memory, this one has raised a variety of questions and concerns among many stakeholders in education about what new policies regarding the assessment of learners and the evaluation of teachers at P–12 and higher education levels may be developed and implemented. There are additional concerns about what appears to be a battle for the future of public schools.

And so we come back to the question posed earlier, “Where should we go from here?” From both a national and professional perspective, the answer to the question depends on whether the question itself comes from a place of dread or anticipation, of reactive or proactive response. The theme for the 2017 Symposium on Music Teacher Education, “Imagining Possible Futures,” responds to this question by challenging us to imagine what music teacher preparation, instruction, content, and context can be. We will challenge ourselves to engage in dynamic

dialogue guided by the work of so many in our profession who have kept their eyes steadfastly focused on a point beyond the present. The future always comes, whether we are ready for it or not, and the future that was alluded to by the Tanglewood participants is already here. Our responsibility is clear: We must interrogate music teacher education in ways that can transform the future of music teaching and learning.

References

Hickey, M., Rees, F. (2002). Developing a model for change in music teacher education. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 12(1), 7–11.

Kimpton, J. (2005). What to do about music teacher education: Our profession at a crossroads. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 14(2), 8–21.

Mark, M. L. (2000). MENC: From Tanglewood to the present. In Madsen, C. K. (Ed.), *Vision 2020: The Housewright symposium on music education* (pp. 5–22). Reston, VA: MENC.

Sarath, E., Myers, D., Chattah, J., Higgins, L., Rudge, D., Rice, T. (2014). Transforming music study from its foundations: A manifesto for progressive change in the undergraduate preparation of music majors. Retrieved from http://www.music.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1859

Spearman, C. E. (2000). How will societal and technological changes affect the teaching of music? In Madsen, C. K. (Ed.), *Vision 2020: The Housewright symposium on music education* (pp. 155–184). Reston,